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THE INDIAN WARS AND NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY AFTER 1865

BY

Lieutenant Colonel John R. Hostettler
United States Army

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THE INDIAN WARS AND NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY
AFTER 1865

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel John R. Hostettler
United States Army

Colonel Howard K. Hansen, Jr.
Project Adviser



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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

ABSTRACT

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After the Civil War, a perception of the western environment began to take form, far different from that held in the past. As valuable minerals were found and word of the West's agricultural opportunities were reported, the nation's leadership was faced with a powerful surge of westward movement by vast numbers of white settlers. However, standing in the way of this wave of progress was the American Indian.

In an attempt at dealing with this problem, the political leadership formulated an Indian national policy which had as its objective, the placement of all Indians on reservations. However, the army, as an instrument to be used by the executive branch in executing this policy, was never able to develop a military strategy to achieve this political end state.

INTRODUCTION

After devastating fighting during the Civil War, the nation was not only faced with the task of reunification, but it also had a persistent Indian problem that needed to be addressed. This would have required the nation's political leadership to devise an Indian policy and then determine whether or not its military element of power would be utilized to carry out that policy. Should they choose the military option, then a military strategy would be developed. In this process, the military would have no concern whether the policy is correct or not. As General William Tecumseh Sherman expressed: "The army has no policy about Indians. It has no voice in Congress, but accepts laws as enacted ... and executes them with as much intelligence, fidelity, and humanity as any other body of citizens." ¹ The army is concerned only with the relation between the political policy and the military means to achieve that policy. Since the political leadership was to set the policy, then it would be obligated to allocate resources to the military to be used in attaining the policy. Then it would be up to the military to do the best that they could.

In 1865, most believed that the policies available to the nation in dealing with the Indians were limited. General Alexander McCook summed up the feelings of his fellow countrymen by announcing the only three alternatives: isolate Indians in the country west of the Kansas settlements and east of

California; place Indians on reservations; or exterminate them. The first option was not viable because of the rapid progress of westward expansion and the third was not feasible because of humanitarian reasons. That left the reservation system as the most realistic course of action. ² However, trying to develop that into a military strategy caused General Philip H. Sheridan some concern. What bothered him most was the lack of a firm national consensus on the righteousness of the conquest, subjugation and confinement of the Indians.

We cannot avoid being abused by one side or the other. If we allow the defenseless people on the frontier to be scalped and ravished, we are burnt in effigy and execrated as soulless monsters, insensible to the suffering of humanity. If the Indian is punished to give security to these people, we are the same soulless monsters from the other side. ³

Faced with this no-win situation, Sheridan came more and more to settle on a strategy of acting first and taking the consequences later. ⁴

What hampered military leaders was the lack of critical pieces of national political guidance that should have resulted from a coherent Indian policy. Political authorities needed to provide a clear statement of what the nation should "look like" after the Indians were on reservations and a clear set of political objectives that when achieved would have allowed the previous endstate to become a reality. Military objectives then could have been chosen that, when accomplished, would have caused the political objectives to be achieved. This never occurred and a consistent, long range military strategy to deal with the Indians was never developed.

However, the failure to receive political direction from the top was not the only reason for there not being a comprehensive military strategy. As discussed in the following sections, a wide variety of issues, including the misconception among whites about Indians, the perception of the western environment, the staff-line controversy and personality conflicts, all impeded the development and implementation of the nation's policy regarding Indians.

THE WESTERN ENVIRONMENT

By 1865, the Indian population was confined to the Great Plains, the Southwest, and the interior of the Pacific Northwest. This had been accomplished through the nation's original policy toward the Indians of removal: to lands that were not suitable to white inhabitation; and from lands that were included in the boundaries of states. The Indians would be protected on these lands from the white encroachment either on their domain or their way of life. They could then dwell in free and happy isolation from their white tormentors, absorbing civilization at their own pace or rejecting it altogether.⁵ However, as perceptions of the western environment changed, Indian policy and military strategy were affected.

Most Americans had made sweeping generalizations about the huge region known as the Permanent Indian Frontier, and saw little value in white occupation.⁶ White Americans were used to judging the fertility of new land by

the kind of trees that were growing on it. The absence of trees over the great expanses of the plains was regarded as proof that the area was unsuitable to any kind of agriculture and therefore was uninhabitable. ⁷ Military leaders and explorers reinforced the notion of a "Great Desert" through their writings, by indicating that they too had no use for this land. In 1869, Sherman advised Sheridan that "in truth the [Missouri River] country was not fit for white people at all". ⁸ He viewed much of the trans-Mississippi region as a useless wasteland and was content to give that land to the Indians in order to end the western struggles. A year later, Sherman also stated that the occupation of Arizona was a "great waste of good material to banish soldiers to that desert". ⁹ He even urged Congress to force "Mexico to take Arizona back". ¹⁰

General William B. Hazen characterized the region west of the 100th meridian as almost totally devoid of agricultural potential. "Of this entire country, one-half may be considered of no value", while the other half was grazing land that could support only "a scanty pastoral population". ¹¹ These barren lands would never be much use, and "no amount of railroads, schemes of colonization or government encouragement can ever make more of it". ¹² He deplored misleading information being published about the high plains, stating that "every one interested in this country systematically deceives everyone else with regard to it". ¹³ Hazen also contended that accounts of the fertility and abundance of the high plains were deceptively designed to help the

railroads sell land, fleece immigrants, and bilk bond buyers. He still maintained in 1874 that most of the land was arid, "and will not, in our day and generation, sell for one penny an acre, except through fraud and ignorance".¹⁴

However, as settlements moved up the valleys of the Platte and Kansas rivers, the myth of the desert was destroyed and in its place, people began to view western North America as a veritable Garden of Eden. This was a place, whose rich farmlands could support huge numbers of farmers and whose grazing land could support thousands of cattle or sheep.¹⁵ This continuing theme was recounted in hundreds of printed sources and reiterated in extensive correspondence from men who purportedly knew the West. Linus P. Brockett summed this up in his encyclopedic gazetteer by stating;

in no part of the vast domain of the United States, and certainly in no other country under the sun, is there a body of land equal in extent, in which there are so few acres unfit for cultivation, or so many which with irrigation or without it, will yield such bountiful crops.¹⁶

Even Sherman, in 1878, recognized the Plains as "the safety valve of the Nation", which "afforded an outlet for the surplus population and added vastly to the wealth and property of all."¹⁷

Since the westward movement was a fact of life and beyond major governmental influence, the question was what to do with the Indians who stood in its way.¹⁸ Removal beyond a Permanent Indian Frontier was no longer possible and some other humane disposition had to be worked out. Therefore, the government adopted an Indian policy centered on the reservation system,

where Indians would begin an acculturation process that would eventually usher them into the Anglo-American world. ¹⁹ However, even after placing them on reservations, the lands, if found economically productive, would be taken from them in the interests of what whites called progress.

No more evident was this than when the lands yielded valuable resources. Discovery of gold and silver provided a steady flow of people westward seeking personal wealth. The Cherry Creek strikes of 1858 triggered the Pike's Peak gold rush and led to the founding of Denver. On the eastern flank of the Sierra Nevada, discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859 set off a rush that carried into the 1860's. In the Pacific Northwest, the Colville strikes of 1855 were followed in 1858 by the Fraser River rush. In 1860, goldseekers pushed into the Nez Perce country and others who followed opened mines in the tributaries of the Snake River. Beginning in 1861, prospectors turned up riches on the headwaters of the Missouri River and swelled Montana's population to nearly 30,000 by 1864. Gold deposits brought miners flocking to the lower Colorado River and the mountains bordering it on the east. ²⁰

When gold was discovered during Custer's Black Hills Expedition of 1874, there was a demand from the public to open the area that was presently occupied by "a few miserable savages". ²¹ Since this area was part of the Great Sioux Reservation, guaranteed to them by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, the military was used initially to prevent entrance of miners. Yielding to public

pressure, Congress sent a commission to negotiate with the Sioux for purchase of the Hills. The Indians' refusal to sell led the government to decide that even though white entry to the reservation was still prohibited, the military was no longer needed to protect those borders. ²² Given this, the Black Hills gold rush was on and open warfare resulted between whites and Indians. This in turn would lead to the Sioux being pushed off the reservation that had been "given" to them.

As the nation faced west, problems continued to surface for the military. Immigrants who crowded the transcontinental trails, were streaming not only westward from the Missouri River, but eastward from the Pacific shore. All were seeking a new life and wealth in gold or silver, cattle, timber, agriculture, or commerce. Stagecoach lines mingled with freight caravans and immigrant wagons, while the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads raced toward their union at Promontory Summit in 1869 that would span the continent. ²³ This surge of migration would add a million citizens to the census rolls of the western states and territories between 1860 and 1870. ²⁴ Demand from each of these quarters for protection from Indian incursions placed a strain on the military's ad hoc Indian strategy.

Up to this point in time, any military success was not attributable to a strategy that was understood and practiced by officers in the field. Instead the results were from a commander's personal experience in the West and his

perception of the environment; this is what really affected implementation of military strategy against Indians in those areas. Sherman, who had little use for the desolate Southwest, assigned none of his best commanders to that region. Therefore, his appointments to the Departments of Arizona and New Mexico enjoyed little success in controlling the local Indians. ²⁵ In other areas, where the division chief saw his domain as being unfit for whites, a tolerant attitude was also frequently adopted toward the Indians. On the other hand, if commanders regarded western lands in favorable terms they stressed the need to open them up for white settlement. They also tended to take an aggressive military posture against Indians in order to push Indians into less desirable areas with all deliberate speed. ²⁶ But now, every commander had to acknowledge that all the land was open for white habitation and that they had to guarantee control over areas once judged to be Indian.

The excitement of advancing the frontier, of subduing the wilderness, of bringing civilization to virgin territories had gripped the entire country. ²⁷ The western course of white occupation could neither be denied or delayed, and the Indian could only yield or perish. ²⁸ The military established forts in response to the demands of pioneer communities for security. But as these forts afforded some type of protection, settlers began to move out from these and their perception of that environment began to also change. This in turn, led to more settlements and still more forts--resulting in a continuous cycle that

could not be stopped.

THE WHITE PERCEPTION OF INDIANS

The nation's leadership, as well as the nation's peoples, viewed Indians as members of an inferior race embracing a primitive culture. In war, they were inordinately barbarous, which was attributed to the natural, ingrained savageness of the race. The tribes, therefore, were perceived as a stone-age barrier to the inevitable progress resulting from the expansion of white, Christian civilization. ²⁸ For these reasons, the development of a military strategy was affected by white prejudices against American Indians and the white need for progress.

A progressively westward struggle with the American "wilderness" had been a dominant theme of this country's history since the settlement of Jamestown in the seventeenth century. The idea of explorers, moving into the unknown, to battle all odds and becoming the sole master of that time and place, had always fulfilled the white man's image of the great conqueror. And once the wilderness was conquered that area would then have to be raised to a state of civilization before heading off to the next great wilderness. However, in order to conquer the wilderness, the Indian people had to be conquered, then civilized. ²⁹ But the only frame of reference the white man had for civilization was their own background, therefore, they strove to make the Indian over in

their own image. ³¹

In an era rife with Darwinian influences, the Caucasian race was believed to be superior and Native Americans were perceived to be at a lower evolutionary stage. ³² Even considering their stage of development, Indians were categorized as either being a good Indian or a bad Indian. The bad Indian was barbarous, cruel, lecherous, deceitful, filthy, lazy, and superstitious. ³³ They were "dirty beggars and thieves, who murdered the weak and unprotected, ... kept no promises and made them only the more easy to carry on their murder and pillage". ³⁴ On the other hand, good Indians were simple children of nature who were wise, hospitable, courageous and eloquent. However, the white man saw nothing worth saving in either's culture and truly believed the Indian would benefit economically, politically, socially and culturally by incorporation into the life of White America. ³⁵

General Sheridan agreed that the ultimate goal of the government's Indian policy should be the conversion of the nomadic tribes from their old culture to an agricultural way of life on reservations built around mainstream white culture. But Sheridan disagreed with the means to achieve this end. He regarded all Indians as savages with "only one profession, that of arms, and every one of them belongs to it, and they never can resist the natural desire to join in a fight if it happens to be in their vicinity". ³⁶ This meant that military force had to be used in dealing with the Indians; only then could they be

controlled in order to eventually civilize them.

This caused problems within the military because they had little respect for the Indians they had to conquer. Their employment against this foe was more of a necessary evil to carry out the nation's policy than a glorious enterprise. This conflict was simply not a "real war" in the minds of those who had won honors in the great struggle of 1861-1865. Many were more interested in re-fighting old Civil War battles than in formulating new strategies of warfare to deal with their new foe. General Winfield Scott Hancock wrote that Indian warfare need not be given undo consideration since it "is of secondary importance, and is comparatively temporary in its nature". Also he felt that since Indian warfare "furnishes only incidental duty for part of the army" it was "entitled to no weight" when formulating long-term military policy [strategy].³⁷ This type of thought, along with preconceived prejudice towards the Indians, did not allow military leaders to foresee that Indian resistance would engage the army until the end of the nineteenth century.

Whether the military argued that Indians were basically childlike and thus required disciplining or whether they argued that Indians were fundamentally warlike and respected only the same in others, the army came to the same conclusion--force tempered with fairness was essential. So pervasive was this sentiment that even those who may have empathized with Indian

resistance assumed force was ultimately necessary in order to save the Indian for civilization. ³⁸

The political leadership had difficulty in coming to grips with the fact that the Native Americans could not be put into a general grouping called Indians and treated as a single entity. Tribal particularism led the Indian to think of themselves only as Cheyenne, Sioux, Kiowa, Apache, or Arapahoe; and intertribal animosities caused them to fight one another more often and more violently than they fought the whites. Any alliances that they did form, really did not last long enough to create a serious threat to the nation. ³⁹ However, this misperception of a single entity lead political leaders to believe conflict against all Indians was the only solution. This hampered the development of a military strategy by not allowing the army to consider treating Indians as individuals or as individual tribes. Had they approached it in this manner, offending persons or tribes could have been separated from the innocent and punished. Instead, they became involved in a conventional type conflict--where punishment fell where it may, on guilty and innocent alike. ⁴⁰ Even if Sherman had truly said, "that the only good Indian is a dead Indian", he would not have been addressing the whole Indian race. Rather, he would have been targeting that population that were defiant of the political leader's will.

The decisions of Chief Justice John Marshall in the early 1830's strengthened the position of the Indian tribes. In "Cherokee Nation vs Georgia",

he characterized Indian tribes as "domestic dependent nations...in a state of pupillage" to the United States. ⁴¹ And in "Worcester vs Georgia", he argued that each Indian tribe was a distinct political community. They occupied their own territory where the laws of the surrounding state had no jurisdiction. Further, the whole intercourse between the United States and Indians was governed by the Constitution and laws vested in the government of the United States. ⁴²

Given this, the nation continued to believe that treaties could be negotiated with the tribes which would bring lasting peace. However, most Indian leaders had no idea what they were signing or what they were giving up or gaining. Part of the problem was the Indian could not understand the white man's obsession with possessing land. They looked upon land as a group possession, that recognized the right of all to partake of its bounty. No individual could "own" any part of it to the exclusion of others. Use privileges might be granted or sold, but sale of the land itself was a concept foreign to the Indian mind. The earth, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce told treaty commissioners, was "too sacred to be valued by or sold for silver and gold". ⁴³

Another problem with treaties was that the Indian "chiefs who signed the treaties did not always fully represent all the bands of tribes thus bound. Americans, on the other hand, were a nation where the people put responsibility on one person, who spoke for them and had all authority; they also believed that in the Indians. They thus assumed that "chiefs" were

absolute rulers and had greater authority than they could possibly possess. ⁴⁴

However, the highly individualistic character of tribal society inhibited the rise of leaders who could bring together diverse opinions. Rarely, were these "chiefs" able to make their people comply with the provisions of any treaty, especially when the customs of generations were possibly surrendered. ⁴⁵

Therefore, promises went unkept and treaties were broken.

In fact, the dependent yet sovereign nation concept did not work. It only resulted in the nation actually encouraging the Indians to continue in their old ways, while at the same time the nation was condemning them for being savages. While the nation was trying to lead the Indians into civilization, they had presented to the "world a picture of weakness and vacillation, deliberately sacrificing men and women, one of whose lives was worth more than the existence of all the Indians in America". ⁴⁶ These type of formable barriers prevented both Indians and whites from truly understanding the purposes and ways of thinking of the other. And in turn, a military strategy was difficult, if not impossible, to implement and execute.

CIVILIAN versus MILITARY CONTROL

Ideally, Indian policy could have been outlined by the President after detailed consultation with key advisers and consensus building within many groups such as reformers, western politicians, friendly Indian leaders,

businessmen, and Congress. The War Department, in conjunction with the army's leadership, would then develop a military strategy that would achieve the desired presidential outcome. Division commanders could then be given clear and consistent instructions, who in turn could advise their departmental subordinates on the best means of implementing the military strategy. This idealistic process never became a reality because of the relationship of the Secretary of War with the Commanding General and the intense rivalry between staff and line officers. " "

At a time when the Secretary of War and the Commanding General should have been working together in developing a military strategy, they were embroiled in fighting over who actually controlled the army. This controversy had been perennial since the creation of the Commanding General position in 1821. Ever since 1836, army regulations had even reflected a division of authority between the two offices:

The military establishment is placed under the orders of the Major-General Commanding-in-Chief, in all that regards its discipline and military control. Its fiscal arrangements properly belong to the administrative departments of the staff, and to the Treasury Department under the direction of the Secretary of War. " "

Neither the law nor the regulations made clear who was subordinate to whom or whether each acted independently of the other, yet under the President's orders. This division of authority between the Secretary of War and the Commanding General, caused the army to function without a clear

understanding of which office set routine policy. ⁴⁹ The lines of authority and responsibility were poorly defined, so that the making of military decisions required much negotiation among independent centers of power. When confronted with a problem that required a joint effort by several agencies, the War Department all too often floundered in confusion. This lack of proper direction in the Department began at the top and penetrated down through all levels of the army. ⁵⁰

In the person of General Ulysses S. Grant, the position of Commanding General had reached the pinnacle of power and prestige in 1864-1865, when President Lincoln treated him as chief strategic planner and director of the armies, equal in authority to the Secretary of War. That soon changed with the end of the Civil War when once again the Secretary of War exercised his fiscal responsibility over the army. Since all staff bureaus were part of the War Department, as defined by the act of 1866, they came under the control of the Secretary of War and were outside the influence of the Commanding General. Grant found himself in a position that was supposedly required for the operational direction of an active force on the frontier; yet he commanded scarcely more than his personal aides. ⁵¹

When General Sherman assumed command of the army in March 1869, he anticipated immediate reforms in his relationship with the Secretary of War, especially with Grant in the White House. Grant's personal experience with the

problem of divided authority and his power during the Civil War would surely lead to a favorable outcome for the army. However, Grant decided in favor of the Secretary of War retaining control of the army because it was constitutionally proper.³² Sherman, therefore, found upon reaching the pinnacle of power and achievement in his profession that it was devoid of real authority and influence.

The position of Commanding General had less power and fewer important duties than those possessed by staff bureau officers and divisional and department commanders. In essence the Commanding General was reduced to a figurehead, while the actual administration of the army was performed by the various staff bureau officers, who answered directly to the Secretary of War. This situation soon became intolerable and lead Sherman to complain in 1871 that his "office had been by law stript of all the influence and prestige it possessed under Grant and even in matters of discipline and army control I am neglected, overlooked, or snubbed."³³

With Sherman's retirement on February 4, 1884, General Sheridan believed that he could accomplish what had eluded even the powerful Sherman. He was determined to assume control of all the army, and not allow the staff bureau chiefs the immense power they had exercised for so long. His efforts to limit the bureau chiefs to only the fiscal administration of the army and his attempts to establish his authority over them by issuing them orders without

prior approval of the Secretary of War, led to immediate conflict. Secretary of War Robert Lincoln quickly established his control by reprimanding Sheridan and provided him a letter which clearly defined their relationship. The bureau chiefs were thus assured their independence and, to add to Sheridan's humiliation, whenever the Secretary of War was out of the capital the senior bureau chief temporarily assumed that office. ⁵⁴

With counterparts in the headquarters of the territorial divisions and departments, staff bureaus also gave the Secretary of War an apparatus by which he could reach the army without recourse to the Commanding General. ⁵⁵

Thus lacking a large personal staff and having no control over the staff bureaus, the Commanding General was unable in reality to direct military operations or to make military strategy to carry out national policy. ⁵⁶

Sheridan could enjoy the high honor of being the Commanding General, but he was only an adviser to the Secretary of War, while the actual administration of the army was performed by the various staff bureau chiefs. ⁵⁷

The War Department, as defined by the act to increase and fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States in 1866, consisted of ten administrative and supply bureaus: the Adjutant General's Department, the medium of orders and commands and the custodian of records and archives; the Inspector General's Department, charged with inspecting and reporting on the proficiency, discipline, and leadership of the army; the Judge Advocate

General's Department, the reviewing authority for military courts and source of legal advice for the Secretary of War; the Quartermaster's Department, responsible for barracks and quarters, transportation of personnel and materiel, and procurement and distribution of most classes of supply; the Subsistence Department, responsible for the content, procurement, and distribution of rations; the Medical Department, the custodian of the health and hygiene of the army; the Pay Department, whose paymasters traveled endlessly to distribute the soldier's wages; the Corps of Engineers, charged with mapping and construction; the Ordnance Department, responsible for testing, selecting, procuring or manufacturing, and distributing arms, ammunition, and all related accouterments and equipment; and the Signal Corps, concerned with communications, particularly flags, torches, and telegraph. ⁹⁸

These staff bureaus were not attached to military departments or line units and took orders only from the Secretary of War under his vested authority of having sole power over the expenditure of army appropriations. This relationship, along with that of the Commanding General and the Secretary of War, was but part of the larger and more fundamental problem of the relationship between the staff and line, with the staff being "completely separated in sympathy from the army proper". ⁹⁹

Although staff officers were assigned to divisions and departments, they usually owed their appointments to Washington. As such, they normally looked

to that quarter for guidance and support, instead of to the general on whose staff they served. Backed by their bureau chiefs in Washington, the division and department staffs could cripple the ability of operational commanders to control their own logistics and execute their campaign plans. " Since the staff decided what was needed, where it was needed, and how and when to get it there, bureau chiefs could force changes to those plans by ordering their subordinates on the commanders staff not to purchase or issue needed equipment. Thus, they substituted their judgement of the field situation for that of the commander in the field, upon whose shoulders responsibility rested and upon whom the blame fell when an action failed. "

Stationed almost entirely in major cities, staff officers also enjoyed privileges and comforts unknown to officers at remote frontier border posts. Because this type of duty was preferred by many, staff positions were held in high esteem and candidates for these posts were not lacking. Officers vying for these positions would use every advantageous political and social connection to help assure selection; and once an officer was appointed to a staff bureau, they would remain with it for the rest of their army career.

The chief of each bureau was himself a lifetime appointee of the President. This life tenure, coupled with long residence in Washington, allowed him and his staff to become a powerful interest group. They were able to cultivate key members of Congress and thus to influence legislation favorable to the staff

while diverting the impact of congressional economy moves from staff to line. The nature of their duties also brought them into frequent contact with general officers of the army with whom close relations of friendship sprang up, gaining favor and influence of those high officers in all questions affecting their status. ⁶²

The staff also had a disproportionate share of high ranking officers in comparison with the line. While each bureau was headed by a Brigadier General, except the Inspector General Department and the Signal Corps who had a Colonel, the line was restricted by act of Congress to five Major Generals and ten Brigadier Generals. In fact, by 1876, the staff claimed 7 of the 13 Brigadier Generals, 31 of the 75 Colonels, 37 of the 80 Lieutenant Colonels, and 172 of the 242 Majors. The staff was very generous in letting the line have lower rank positions by conceding the line 490 of the 590 First Lieutenant and 435 of the 445 Second Lieutenant positions. ⁶³

Besides feeling that the staff got all the promotions, line officers believed that the staff was entirely too large. They pointed out that three out of every eight officers in the army belonged to supply or administrative bureaus and that the staff departments spent on themselves a sixth of the army's budget. Line officers also complained that their staff colleagues, while stationed in towns and cities, enjoyed the company of their families and the amenities of civilian life, while they were often marooned at remote western posts with

few luxuries to mitigate the hardships and dangers of the field. ⁶⁴

Line officers, on the other hand, saw preparation for combat as the only proper mission of their service. They felt that representatives of the fighting force (infantry, cavalry, and artillery) should have the determining voice in all questions of military plans, organization, and administration. But the civilian Secretary of War and the uniformed technicians of the bureaus made most of the important decisions. The bureaus turned equipment, men and facilities "over to the army to be tested in war without an opportunity for the general in chief, or the officers who may die in their defense, to make the slightest suggestion". ⁶⁵ To make this injustice more bitter, line officers felt that staff positions, instead of being distributed equitably to the army on the basis of merit and faithful service, often went to men whose only qualification for them was the enjoyment of friends in high places.

For all these reasons, the line resented the staff, but for the same reasons, the line also envied the staff. The tendency became that the line officer looked to the staff as the highest objective of their ambition and began to compete strenuously for appointments to the staff. Sherman was concerned that this tendency of the line officers to "belittle their military calling, and to exalt into staff duty" would "continue to degrade us as a profession, and finally result in ruin unless checked." ⁶⁶

It was not until 1894 that this situation was somewhat resolved. At that

time, Congress closed all staff bureau positions to all applicants except line officers. They believed that by training all line officers in administration and supply, those officers would be better prepared for assuming high level commands during wartime. However, throughout the military-Indian conflicts after the Civil War, the staff-line controversy continued to hurt morale, reduce efficiency and hamper efforts to coordinate policies established in Washington with events that occurred in the West. ⁶⁷

PERSONALITIES

The military leadership of the post-Civil War army was fragmented into hostile factions--staff and line, infantry and cavalry, young and old, West Pointer and Volunteer, Civil War veteran and peacetime newcomer. They bickered incessantly over petty issues of precedence, real or imagined insults, and old wartime controversies. They preferred charges on the slightest provocation and consequently had to spend a preposterous share of their time on courts-martial duty. They exploited every possible family connection in quest for preferment. ⁶⁸ The ambitious of all ranks tried to manipulate army legislation to advance themselves and their friends.

Rival generals resorted to the newspaper columns to discredit each other. Aspirants to promotion shamelessly cultivated influential businessmen and politicians, upon whom they called for assistance in their fight for choice

positions. ⁶⁹ Abrasive personalities, petty animosities and personal ambition precluded cooperation at any level. Feuds, pettiness, jealousy, power struggles and personality clashes, made it impossible to develop and execute any type of comprehensive and cohesive military strategy in dealing with the American Indian.

The two most influential officers during the era were Generals Sherman and Sheridan. For almost fifteen years, from 1869 to 1883, Sherman was Commanding General of the army, leading that service for a longer period of time than any other officer except Winfield Scott. He was the leading military personality for a generation of soldiers from the Civil War until his death in 1891. ⁷⁰ Sheridan, meanwhile, served as the Division of Missouri Commander, who waged the war against the Indians and eventually followed Sherman as the Commanding General. As such, the chief division of officers in the army were those who considered themselves to be either Sherman or Sheridan men. Sheridan's favorites included George Armstrong Custer and Wesley Merritt while Sherman continued to support Hazen, Benjamin H. Grierson, Edward O. C. Ord, and Oliver O. Howard. This developed because officers were obsessed with the glorious days of the Civil War and therefore looked to their former commanders for protection and patronage. As such, they expected these generals to give them desirable assignments, extended leaves, recommendations, staff assignments for friends or colleagues, and support in

disputes with other officers. This often led to professional disputes and disruption of the normal channels of military communication. ⁷¹

Although officers were aligned, this split did not have any affect upon the relationship between Sherman and Sheridan. However, when it came to the development and implementation of Indian military strategy, this split was significant because of the power Sheridan had regarding the Indians. With Sherman assuming the duties of Commanding General, he found his time taken up with increasingly strained relations with the staff bureaus, various secretaries of war, and with Congress. While he worked to "sustain the authority of the Generals in command of Divisions and Departments--without the aid of the President and the Secretary of War", Sherman left Sheridan the task of handling the Indian situation. ⁷² Therefore, Sheridan became the central figure and his relationship with officers of other factions, and the problems between individual officers of the different factions, played a key role in how the Indians were treated.

Sheridan was a "good hater". If an officer failed to perform his duty, or even failed to share Sheridan's zeal, the general's wrath was unrelenting and unmerciful. He never forgave those who failed or in some way offended him. ⁷³ His constant persecution of General William B. Hazen glaringly displays his cruel pettiness. They first clashed during the Civil War, each claiming credit for first reaching the crest of Missionary Ridge at Chattanooga in 1863 and the

capture of eleven rebel cannons. ⁷⁴ Although Grant sided with Sheridan, the controversy continued for the next 25 years and Sheridan never forgave Hazen.

In 1868, Sherman selected Hazen, whose views on Indians coincided with his own, to command the Southern Indian Military District. Sherman also instructed him to order the friendly bands of Indians to the Indian Territory and to provide them sanctuary. At the same time, Sheridan and Custer were conducting military operations to drive the recalcitrants south of the Kansas border. Just as their force was ready to deal a devastating blow to the largest remaining body of Indians, Hazen provided signed testimony that the Indians were innocent and had not been on the warpath that year. Sheridan charged that if Hazen had not interfered, "the Indian problem on the Texas frontier" would have been solved at that time, while Custer stated that Hazen had been "completely deceived" by the Indians. ⁷⁵ Hazen charged that the official records revealed the false imputations and "mischievous errors" propagated by Custer and Sheridan. Here each man believed that they were implementing what they perceived to be the nation's military strategy. But when its execution depended upon their cooperation, they were still fighting the Battle of Missionary Ridge.

Sheridan continued to torment Hazen throughout his military career, using every opportunity to retard his advancement. In 1872, he personally made the decision to transfer Hazen and his regiment to Fort Buford, the most remote

and desolate post in the country. When Hazen requested a 30 day leave prior to the transfer, in order to allow an old injury to heal, Sheridan reluctantly gave his approval with the following endorsement:

...[I] must confess that he has done much injury to the discipline of the army by his reluctance to do duty with his regiment (which should be his pride), and I find it impossible to remove from my mind the impression that this reluctance is the foundation of his present disability. ⁷⁶

This groundless supposition could only prejudice the military hierarchy against Hazen. And later, when the time came to confront the hostile Sioux on the northern plains, Hazen was conspicuously absent from the action despite the fact that his regiment was stationed near the scene of combat. ⁷⁷ Hazen believed Sheridan did this to keep him from receiving any credit for possible success against these Indians, even though he was probably one of the better Indian fighters. Hazen, however, was vindicated in the end, when his friend Garfield was elected President. He was quickly promoted to Brigadier General and made Chief Signal officer. Even after Sheridan became Commanding General, he had no control over Hazen and could not further torment him.

Although Grant considered General George Crook to be "the best, wildest Indian fighter in the country", Crook's relationship with Sheridan was also seriously strained. ⁷⁸ Once again, Civil War incidents were at the root cause and would bother Crook even after Sheridan's death. Sheridan's victory at Fisher's Hill during the Shenandoah Valley campaign in 1864 was the result of Crook's brilliant plan, yet he received little credit for it in the battle report.

Additionally, when Crook's opportunity to distinguish himself as the Army of the Potomac's cavalry commander seemed to appear, it was quickly shattered when Grant gave that command to Sheridan.

After becoming the Commander of the Department of Arizona, Crook would conduct brilliant campaigns against the Indians leading to his early promotion to Brigadier General in 1873. However, that did earn him the enmity of many officers because of their strong belief in the seniority promotion system. But during this time, Crook's well-publicized sympathy with the Indian plight and his cooperation with humanitarian groups, most notably Herbert Welsh's Indian Rights Association, clearly put him at odds with Sheridan. Numerous times in the following years, Crook would partially disobey Sheridan's instructions in dealing with the Indians. The same results were achieved, but they were accomplished in a way that would be more acceptable to the Indians. Sheridan, on the other hand, viewed Crook's actions as self-serving to win glory and did not consider that the same end was gained. Their final clash, over the use of Indians as allies against hostile Indians, led to Crook submitting his resignation as Commander, Department of Arizona, which Sheridan gladly accepted.

General Benjamin Grierson too felt that Sheridan had restricted his rise within the army because of Sheridan's partiality toward other officers. He first served under Sheridan in the summer of 1865 while preparing his troops

for duty in Texas. Grierson thought that he would be commanding a brigade or the division cavalry, but he was relieved and ordered home. He felt favoritism guided Sheridan's move, for the "... purpose of making a place for two of his toadies ... Custer and Merritt".⁸⁰ Grierson suffered the same treatment during the 1868 Washita campaign, so he would not come into contact with Custer, whom he outranked.

Compounding this relationship was Grierson's view of President Grant's Peace Policy. He warmly embraced it as an enlightened experiment to save a wronged people and believed the cause of all Indian disturbances was the failure of the government to fulfill its obligations to the tribes. Sheridan, on the other hand, begrudgingly supported the Peace Policy out of respect for his old friend Grant. Even though Grierson might well reflect the position of a large portion of the public, Sheridan was not obliged to suffer officers who failed to uphold his views on Indians if he could help it.⁸¹ Army politics limited what Sheridan could really do to Grierson, since he had strong personal relationships with Grant and Sherman.

Others were more concerned with politics and only viewed their military service as a way to reach those heights. Winfield Scott Hancock, who commanded the Department of the Missouri in 1866, had presidential aspirations and fully realized that successful Indian campaigns had helped put Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison in the White House.⁸² When his

campaign against the Southern Plains Tribes in April 1867 failed, he searched for a scapegoat to take the blame. He found one in Sheridan's protege, Custer.

The resulting courts-martial , which centered around events that had nothing to do with the outcome of the actual campaign, did overshadow Hancock's failure which further incensed Sheridan. Although, Hancock would later serve as a department commander in Dakota under Sheridan, Hancock's competent dealings with the Indians and his political connections made it impossible for Sheridan to extract any type of revenge. Sheridan's future destiny could itself have been altered because of this personal conflict. Had Hancock been elected president in 1880, instead of being narrowly defeated by Garfield, it is doubtful that Sheridan would have been appointed Commanding General in 1882. ⁸³

The preoccupation with the Civil War manifested itself in numerous courts-martial. Colonel David S. Stanley accused Hazen of cowardice during the Battle of Shiloh, imposture at Stones River and falsifying reports about Missionary Ridge. Hazen countered by accusing Stanley of libel, and a double courts-martial was ordered in 1879. ⁸⁴ Stanley was found guilty of "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline" and received a light reprimand. Hazen, however, was never tried because the statute of limitations had already been exceeded.

This entire farce, while having little impact on the discipline of the army,

did give the public a look at the petty quarrels and old prejudices of prominent military men. Dirty laundry, which had been confined within the military inner circles, now was exposed into the glare of national publicity. ⁶⁵ Other incidents similar to these led Sherman to write that

charges and counter-charges made by our officers of late ... have done more to damage us in public estimation than any other single cause. The army today has plenty of honorable employment to occupy the time and talents of all, without resolving into a General Court to investigate allegations of fraud, prying, scandal and gossip dating back ten and fifteen years. ⁶⁶

During this time, the military was an incestuous profession. It was not uncommon for high-ranking officers to secure a civil appointment in the army for a relative. Custer almost wiped out the entire male line of his family, when he obtained commissions for two brothers, a brother-in-law, and a nephew in the Seventh Cavalry--they all died at the Little Big Horn on 25 June 1876. General Howard used his influences with Sherman and Grant to secure a civil appointment for his son and Sheridan appointed his younger brother to his staff. Sherman became involved in a dispute with President Grant's wife, when he refused to appoint her son to his staff. Sheridan, hardly the stickler for the finer points of regulations that Sherman was, intervened and appointed Frederick Grant to his own staff.

Although nepotism was a common practice, it could have negative impacts in certain areas of the army. This was very apparent, when the Quartermaster General, M.C. Meigs, was forced to retire in favor of Colonel D.H. Rucker, the

father-in-law of Sheridan. This bad example was followed by other staff bureaus, in which elderly officers were given a brief moment at the top and then quickly retired. As a result, the bureaus lost effective and prolonged leadership and sacrificed the building of a professional military service to meet future requirements. ⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

After the Civil War, a perception of the western environment began to take form, far different from that held in the past. As valuable minerals were found and word of the West's agricultural opportunities were reported, the nation's leadership was faced with a powerful surge of westward movement by vast numbers of white settlers. However, standing in the way of this wave of progress was the American Indian.

In an attempt at dealing with this problem, the political leadership formulated an Indian national policy which had as its objective, the placement of all Indians on reservations. However, the army, as an instrument to be used by the executive branch in executing this policy, was never able to develop a military strategy to achieve this political end state.

The Secretary of War and the Commanding General of the Army were consumed in a struggle over who actually controlled the army and never reached a consensus on how to approach the problem. Even had the

Commanding General developed a military strategy on his own, the staff bureaus were under no obligation to support his plans. They were independent, answerable only to the Secretary of War. Since staff bureaus controlled the distribution of the army's support, they could influence all actions taken by the field commanders based upon how the Bureau Chiefs perceived the situation.

With loosely defined limits of authority and lack of specific guidance from the political and military leadership, many department commanders and their subordinates were left on their own in developing military strategy. Although most understood what they were supposed to accomplish against the Indians, cooperation was practically nonexistent because of petty animosities and individual personality conflicts. Even "cordial support among commanders of divided columns was frequently impossible to achieve." "

In the final analysis, there were numerous obstructions to the development and implementation of an effective national military strategy regarding the Indians. But was a military strategy really necessary? Even Sherman believed that the passage of time did more to conquer the Indian than anything that the army could have done. " When reflecting in his memoirs about the Indian conflicts, Sherman saw them as:

dying struggles of a singular race of brave men fighting against destiny, each less and less violent, til the wild game was gone, the whites too

numerous and powerful, so that the Indian question became one of sentiment and charity, but not of war. "9

ENDNOTES

¹ Robert A. Wooster, The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 109.

² Sherry L. Smith, "Civilization's Guardians: Army Officers' Reflections on Indians and the Indian Wars in Trans-Mississippi West, 1848-1890" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1984), 283.

³ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987), 87.

⁴ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1980), 367.

⁵ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1984), 37.

⁶ Robert A. Wooster, 51.

⁷ Henry N. Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 202-203.

⁸ Robert A. Wooster, 53.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 197.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 204.

- ¹⁵ Robert A. Wooster, 51.
- ¹⁶ Henry N. Smith, 215.
- ¹⁷ Robert A. Wooster, 54.
- ¹⁸ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 101.
- ¹⁹ Sherry L. Smith, 283.
- ²⁰ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 71-72.
- ²¹ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 106.
- ²² *ibid.*
- ²³ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 101.
- ²⁴ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891, (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 2.
- ²⁵ Robert A. Wooster, 53.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, 71 and 208.
- ²⁷ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891, 8.
- ²⁸ Francis P. Prucha, American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 84.

²⁹ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 344.

³⁰ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 33.

³¹ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891, 401.

³² Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 122.

³³ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 34.

³⁴ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 197.

³⁵ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 270.

³⁶ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 337-338.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

³⁸ Sherry L. Smith, 290-291.

³⁹ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 169.

⁴⁰ Robert M. Utley, The Contribution of the Frontier to the American Military Tradition (Colorado Springs: United States Air Force Academy, 1977), 11.

⁴¹ Albert J. Beveridge, The Life of John Marshall , vol. 4, The Building of the Nation, 1815-1835 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 545.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 550.

⁴³ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890 , 8-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁵ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 95.

⁴⁶ Francis P. Prucha, 77.

⁴⁷ Robert A. Wooster, 20 and 39.

⁴⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 209.

⁴⁹ Robert A. Wooster, 21.

⁵⁰ Graham A. Cosmas, An Army For Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 19.

⁵¹ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier , 4.

⁵² Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 521.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 519-521.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁵⁵ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 29.

⁵⁶ Graham A. Cosmas, 21.

⁵⁷ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier , 95.

⁵⁸ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 11-12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶¹ Graham A. Cosmas, 25.

⁶² Marvin E. Kroeker, Great Plains Command: William B. Hazen in the Frontier West (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1976), 115.

⁶³ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 42.

⁶⁴ Graham A. Cosmas, 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁶⁶ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 32.

⁶⁷ Robert A. Wooster, 20.

⁶⁸ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891 , 21.

⁶⁹ Graham A. Cosmas, 6.

⁷⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, 230.

⁷¹ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 216.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁷⁴ Robert A. Wooster, 63.

⁷⁵ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 200.

⁷⁶ Marvin E. Kroeker, 114.

⁷⁷ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 233.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸⁴ Paul A. Hutton, ed., Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier, 205.

⁸⁵ Marvin E. Kroeker, 156-162.

⁸⁶ Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891, 39.

⁸⁷ Paul A. Hutton, "General Philip H. Sheridan and the Army in the West, 1867-1888", 217-220.

⁸⁸ Robert A. Wooster, 70.

⁸⁹ Robert M. Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890, 118.

⁹⁰ William T. Sherman, Memiors of General W.T. Sherman (New York: Library of Congress, 1990), 928.

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